

# Lawmakers Focus on Global Mental Health

A Capitol Hill briefing in June focused on the urgency of addressing the global burden of mental health disorders and substance abuse, as well as their social consequences. Speakers at the briefing, sponsored by the National Institute of Health's Fogarty International Center and the Rhode Island congressional delegation, included Sharon Hrynkow, acting director of the Fogarty International Center; Richard Nakamura, deputy director of the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH); Eric Caine, chair of psychiatry at the University of Rochester Medical Center; Nora Volkow, director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA); and all four members of the Rhode Island congressional delegation: Rep. Jim Langevin (D), Sen. Jack Reed (R), Sen. Lincoln Chafee (R), and Rep. Patrick Kennedy (D).

Rep. Langevin spoke about the late Congressman Fogarty's key role among a group of congressional advocates responsible for the growth and development of the NIH, in particular his advocacy of global health research. The Fogarty Center bears his name.

"The Fogarty Center along with NIMH and NIDA are addressing the growing burden of mental health disorders, yet much remains to be done," Rep. Langevin said. "Research and training in global health issues in the poorest countries of the world can contribute to advances that benefit the whole world."

The Fogarty International Center fosters research partnerships between U.S. scientists and foreign counterparts through international training grants, research grants, and fellowships, Hrynkow said. Although the Fogarty has not been traditionally thought of as having a neuroscience component, Hrynkow is a neuroscientist, and the institute funds more than 50 neuroscientists around the world.

"We often think of mental health as a domestic issue, in terms of the social problems it raises in our own society," said Hrynkow. "But, in fact, mental health problems occur globally, and with greater movement across borders—whether by choice or by displacement—mental health disorders may not be rooted in any one particular region but may affect others as well."

Sen. Reed drew a connection between the despair of radical Muslims in the Middle East and national security implications for our own country: "Mental health is not just a national issue—it is a national security issue," he said. "If we do not do something to address the sense of hopelessness, sense of despair

in some parts of the world, our national security will be compromised. Military solutions alone are not enough."

Nakamura noted that the burden of mental illness can be measured and is enormous compared with other diseases. To measure both premature death and disability, the World Bank and the World Health Organization developed a single measure called the Disability Adjusted Life Year (DALY). One DALY represents one lost year of healthy life.

Measures such as the DALYs point to success in ameliorating some of the scourges most often considered global health problems, but also to the lack of attention given to global mental health problems. Unipolar depressive disorders, for example, are now more likely to result in lost years of life than diarrheal diseases, malaria, or heart disease for all age groups worldwide. Mental illness ranked behind only cardiovascular diseases as a contributor to disease burden in the United States, Canada, and western Europe, as measured in DALYs.

Among 14- to 55-year-olds, unipolar depressive disorders ranked behind only HIV/AIDS as creating the greatest disease burden worldwide in 2000, the latest year for which information is available. In developed countries, the disease burden created by unipolar depressive disorders was even higher for this age group, as measured by DALYs.

The University of Rochester's Caine noted that, worldwide, deaths from suicide are greater than those from war and homicide combined. With the aid of a grant from Fogarty, Caine is helping to develop programs to train mental health professionals in Hong Kong and mainland China in suicide prevention.

"Suicide is the most adverse outcome of a variety of adverse outcomes," said Caine. "By training professionals in suicide prevention, we are also training them in dealing with a variety of other mental health disorders."

The program currently targets older men, who are often unlikely to seek the help of mental health professionals, and people who have moved from China to Hong Kong. The program's interventions are modeled on those used by the U.S. Air Force in dealing with similar populations, such as military families who move often and have inadequate support networks.



Rep. Jim Langevin (D)



Sen. Jack Reed (R)



Sen. Lincoln Chafee (R)



Rep. Patrick Kennedy (D)

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#### **NQ: What were some of the features Council wanted to be included?**

**Barnes:** Council felt it was important to have space for displays about neuroscience, proper modern conference rooms, and that the building and SfN's space conform to principles of "sustainable architecture," or "green" design. We are also exploring the possibility of using the move to newly designed space as an opportunity to work with the developing partnership between neuroscientists and architects. This might include a study of the effect of architectural environment on staff health, sense of well-being, productivity, etc.

#### **NQ: Why was it important to have the building in downtown Washington, DC?**

**Barnes:** Downtown Washington, DC, is a good location for committee meetings and for public education events about neuroscience. Location in downtown DC also makes the office easily accessible for meetings with members and for Capitol Hill visits. The office will be centrally located and Metro-accessible, which helps in recruiting and retaining staff that may live in Maryland, DC, or Virginia. Downtown Washington, DC, is a strong, stable real estate market, which will make it easier to attract other tenants, and makes the building's value over time more likely to grow in a predictable way. The specific neighborhood where the building is located is a high-growth area in DC, and many other nonprofit associations are located nearby.

#### **NQ: What will the Society gain by owning, rather than renting, its central office space?**

**Barnes:** There are two answers to this question. In the short-term, as a nonprofit in DC, the Society will receive tax-exempt financing for the portion of the building occupied by SfN. The rates on this financing are two to three points below commercial mortgage financing. We estimate that up to \$11 million may be eligible for such financing. This really tips the balance on buying vs. renting for a DC-based nonprofit organization.

But for the future, ownership of a building is part of the long-range strategy of the Society to ensure the excellence of its programs. By making us less reliant on other revenue sources, the Society will be in a better position to keep the costs of membership, annual meeting fees, and *The Journal* down, and will be able to devote more resources to new projects that members wish to initiate. By having a new revenue source that is independent of membership fees or annual meeting attendance, the Society can make its financial picture more predictable and stable. This is good news for SfN members who want to make sure that the annual meeting and *The Journal* can be maintained from year to year, no matter what else may be going on with the economy or the Society's short-term financial picture. ■

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"This really is a bidirectional enriching process," said Caine. "Hong Kong is in many ways ready to do suicide prevention more than the United States; the leadership is aligning to say this is an important problem for us. We can help inform them of work in the United States on suicide prevention, and the faster mobilization of leadership to address the problem in Hong Kong can inform U.S. efforts to deal with suicide."

During her comments, Volkow said the burden of drug abuse is \$486 billion worldwide. The level of drug abuse in a given region is an approximate measure of "how much kids believe drugs are harmful," she said, and an indicator of the need to get the word out about drugs' harmful effects.

The three priorities for NIDA in the coming years are smoking; cocaine and alcohol addiction; and inhalant abuse, which Volkow called a "silent epidemic," as a result of inhalants being cheap, legal, and easily accessible to those of lower socioeconomic levels. ■

# NEUROSCIENCE

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